

Iowa Outdoors

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
www.iowadnr.gov

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Jan. 29, 2008

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[electronic photos available]

FENCE LINE SYMPHONY FOR ONE NORTH IOWA RABBIT ENTHUSIAST THE SOUND OF THE HOUND CANNOT BE DENIED

By Lowell Washburn
Iowa Department of Natural Resources

For almost as long as he can remember, Bob Benedict has been chasing beagles that were chasing rabbits.

It's really no mystery why Benedict is so smitten by these gentle little hounds. Once heard, there's just something about the sweet baying of beagles that is guaranteed to warm your heart.

The winter symphony comes in a variety of strains. There are bawls, howls, barks, and chops. Blend the melodies together and you'll reach one undeniable conclusion. The sound of the hound is simply the sweetest music to ever reach the frozen ear of a late season rabbit hunter.

"It's really not complicated, and the way I hunt is pretty standard," says Benedict. "The first thing I do is look for an area containing plenty of good habitat and then let the dog do the rest. A good beagle already knows that it needs to head toward the brush and it usually doesn't take long to find the rabbit."

Once the quarry is flushed, it takes but seconds for a sprinting rabbit to put a sizeable distance between it and the hound. That's when the excitement, the fun, and the music begins. Like most good beagle men, Benedict relies mainly on sound to determine how and where the hunt is going. The fresher the scent, the louder and more frequent the baying becomes.

"If I stand in one spot and listen, the dog will let me know what's going on," says Benedict. "A steady, excited bawl is good. It means she's getting plenty of scent and the rabbit is moving down the trail. Sometimes a rabbit will stop and wait to see what the hound is doing. When the dog gets close and jumps it, she'll change to an excited, choppy bark. That tells me she's sighted the rabbit."

When pursued by hounds, cottontails travel in a wide loop that, sooner or later, will bring them back to the vicinity of where they were first jumped. The shape and length of that loop is determined by the shape and length of the habitat.

"I like to hunt places that have brushy fence rows or other lines of habitat," says Benedict. "I try to find an obvious gap in the cover --- a place where circling rabbits are likely to cross. On a good area, eight or ten rabbits may end up using the same crossing. Once I decide where to be, I take a stand and get quiet. After that, I just wait for the dog to bring the rabbits to me."

It's an effective tactic. Utilizing a good stand, a hunter can often bag three or four rabbits without ever moving his feet. During an exceptionally memorable outing, Benedict and his brother loosed three beagles into some likely looking "rabitat." In addition to providing nonstop music, the hounds also produced loads of rabbits. In a spectacular flurry of action, the brothers bagged 15 cottontails without ever losing sight of their parked pickup.

Needless to say, Benedict eats more than his fair share of fresh cottontail. Most often, he treats the tender white meat the same as he would a chicken breast. Regular menu items include fried rabbit, crock pot rabbit, rabbit alfredo, the list goes on. Although he still loves the meat, he admits to inventing new ways to fix it --- such as the 25 pounds of breakfast sausage ground last December.

"The rabbit's white meat is extremely mild," notes Benedict. "The flavor is so good that most people will eat cottontail whether they like wild game or not."

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TROUT STOCKING AT BANNER LAKE SET FOR FEB. 1

INDIANOLA – The Iowa Department of Natural Resources will stock 1,500 rainbow trout in South Banner Lake around noon on Feb. 1. The DNR stocks the 59-acre

lake three or four times during the fall and winter months to offer a different type of fishing experience in central Iowa.

Summerset State Park is the only trout fishery in central Iowa. The trout are raised at the Elkader hatchery. Anglers who want to fish for the trout are required to purchase a trout stamp (\$11) in addition to an Iowa fishing license. The daily bag limit for trout is five and the possession limit is 10.

For more information, contact Ben Dodd at 515-432-2823.

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GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT SET FOR FEBRUARY 15-18

Amateur and accomplished birdwatchers are encouraged to participate in the annual Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) this February 15-18. The big, nationwide counting event is jointly sponsored each year by the Audubon Society and the Cornell (University) Laboratory of Ornithology.

Doug Harr, coordinator for the Iowa DNR Wildlife Diversity Program, said the GBBC is a great way to introduce newcomers to the booming pastime of birding. “A recent national survey indicates number of wildlife watchers in this country at approximately 71 million,” said Harr. “I’d estimate that perhaps 40 to 50 million of those are concentrating on birds. It’s perhaps the nation’s most popular outdoor activity these days.”

The GBBC is an easy means of introducing birdwatching, or “birding” as it is commonly called, because the variety of birds seen around backyard bird feeders is much smaller than the sometimes overwhelming diversity of summer birds, especially in northern states like Iowa. Harr said the average Iowa bird feeder may be visited regularly by 10 to 15 different bird species. Many of those are colorful and somewhat tame, so it’s easy to learn basic identification. Common Iowa feeder birds include cardinals, chickadees, woodpeckers, house finches, nuthatches, goldfinches, titmice, juncos, house sparrows and a few others.

GBBC participants simply count the highest numbers of each bird species observed during at least 15 minutes of feeder watching on one or more of the four count days. Those numbers are next entered on a special CBBC website at www.birdcount.org. Birders can then follow the count nationwide on a continuously updated map of the U.S., seeing where the most birds of each kind are being found. The website also offers hints for identifying birds, as well as digital photos of birds submitted to an online gallery and contest. Because two of the count dates are school days, the CBBC offers possibilities for students and teachers to involve in classroom projects, counting birds seen in their school yard or at a selected count site.

The GBBC began 11 years ago and is already providing annual detailed snapshots of winter birds in the U.S., Harr said. “It’s a great introduction to citizen-science, and it may result in more people taking up the cause of wildlife conservation, either on their own or perhaps even as an eventual profession,” Harr said. The DNR’s Wildlife Diversity Program offers more opportunities for citizen involvement in wildlife surveys. Information on eagle counts, frog/toad surveys and other volunteer monitoring activities may be found on the DNR’s website at <http://www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/diversity/index.html> . Look for the “Getting Involved” menu.

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SPRING IS RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER FOR FROG AND TOAD SURVEYORS

While the winter wind whips and the snow keeps falling, it is hard to imagine spring, but March brings a glimmer of hope. March is when Iowa’s dedicated frog and toad survey volunteers start listening to their call C.D. and sharpening their pencils in preparation for the first warm(ish) night in April.

For 17 years, all over Iowa, folks have set aside three nights of their summer to go outdoors and monitor Iowa’s wetlands for frogs and toads. March 2008 brings an opportunity for anyone interested in joining the ranks of frog and toad call surveyors by attending one of three training workshops hosted by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR). The Volunteer Wildlife Monitoring Program (VWMP) is a four-hour training designed to prepare folks for collecting yearly data on Iowa’s declining wildlife and submitting that data to the Wildlife Diversity Program. These data are crucial to the DNR’s ability to monitor trends of Iowa’s sensitive amphibian community which in turn tell us a bit about Iowa’s water quality.

Frog and Toad call survey volunteers begin by choosing 5-8 wetland monitoring sites. Starting in April volunteers go out after dark, visit each site and listen for what species they can hear, likely Chorus Frogs, Spring Peepers and maybe American Toads. Middle May starts the second survey period which may catch the cricket frogs and gray treefrogs beginning to sing in earnest. Finally, the third visit in June introduces the bass to the frog and toad chorus - bull and green frogs.

Participants in frog and toad survey workshops will learn how to identify all of Iowa’s 16 frog and toad species by sight and by sound. They will learn how to conduct the survey and submit the data collected to the Wildlife Diversity Program through an online database. VWMP Frog and Toad workshops are scheduled during March for Jones, Polk and Palo Alto counties.

Information presented at trainings will appeal to adults with an enthusiasm for the outdoors and an interest in observing wildlife. Pre-registration is required along with a \$5 fee for equipment. Trainings will run from 12:30-4:30. For information on registration and other details, please visit:

<http://www.iowadnr.com/wildlife/diversity/vwmp.html> or contact Stephanie Shepherd, 515-432-2823 x 102, stephanie.shepherd@dnr.iowa.gov.

Frog and Toad Call Survey Workshop Schedule:

March 1

Palo Alto County Conservation Board
Lost Island Lake Nature Center, Ruthven

March 15

Jones County Conservation Board Nature Center,
Central Park, Center Junction

March 29

Polk County Conservation Board
Chichaqua Bottoms Longhouse, near Maxwell

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HELP RESCUE IOWA'S PRAIRIES AND CELEBRATE EARTH DAY

Iowa volunteers are invited to celebrate Earth Day by joining a prairie rescue event. Volunteers of all ages can help restore prairie at approximately 20 sites throughout Iowa. Tasks vary by site and range from cutting out invasive brush to hand-planting native seed. This is Iowa's 9th annual Prairie Rescue Event.

Not only is citizen involvement beneficial to the community, it is crucial for the land upon which the people live. More than 150 years ago, prairies covered 80 percent of the land in Iowa. Today only 0.1 percent of native Iowa prairies remain. In order to save what is left, humans must now manage these prairies by removing invasive species and performing other jobs once handled naturally by prairie wild fires and grazing bison or elk.

In the words of Aldo Leopold, "The first precaution of intelligent tinkering is to keep all the parts." The prairie rescue gives Iowans an opportunity to help save the remaining pieces of our prairies.

Children and adults, individuals and groups can get involved at one of many Prairie Rescue sites across the state. Each site is sponsored by public and private conservation groups, including the Iowa Prairie Network, Loess Hills Preservation

Society, several Iowa County Conservation Boards, the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.

If you are interested in hosting a Prairie Rescue Event, please contact Whitney Davis at the Iowa Department of Natural Resources at (515) 281-6271 or Whitney.Davis@dnr.iowa.gov before Feb. 14. For a listing of Iowa 2008 Spring Prairie Rescue sites, visit the Prairie Rescue website at www.inhf.org/rescue2008.htm beginning in late February.

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GIVE A FEW DOLLARS FOR WILDLIFE

What do peregrine falcons, regal fritillary butterflies, spadefoot toads, and badgers have in common? They are all wildlife species that benefit from contributions to the Fish and Wildlife Fund tax check-off (aka Chickadee Check-off) on line 58 of Iowa state tax form 1040.

Research and habitat management for game species such as deer, turkeys, waterfowl and pheasants are funded through license fees and habitat stamps. Iowa's non-game wildlife relies mainly on the generosity of Iowans through the check-off.

The chickadee check-off has a relatively long history. Introduced by the Iowa legislature in 1981, it was the first check-off and has since been joined by four more. At its high point, more than 16,000 people donated each year raising approximately \$200,000. The fund has fallen 26 percent in the last six years, with fewer than 10,000 people donating approximately \$110,000 in 2006. This is despite the fact that a recent survey indicated that 45 percent of Iowa's population over age 16 engage in wildlife watching activities. Iowa's many non-game species are benefiting from the generous contributions of a few.

Funds from the Fish and Wildlife check-off go to a variety of activities undertaken by the Iowa DNR's Wildlife Diversity Program. The Wildlife Diversity Program is in charge of the 80 percent of Iowa's wildlife that is not hunted, fished or trapped – that is more than 500 species. Check-off funds are used to help host public events in local communities such as Bald Eagle Appreciation Days, Pelican Fest, and Hawk Watch. They are used to fund research on Iowa's most imperiled wildlife such as red-shouldered hawks and ornate box turtles and to restore to Iowa long-gone species such as trumpeter swans, peregrine falcons and ospreys.

Contributions are also used to develop and distribute several educational publications on Iowa's diverse wildlife and to guide the management of public and private lands for the benefit of both people and wildlife.

Investing in the future of Iowa's non-game wildlife is as easy as checking a box on your state tax form. Every cent of each donation is put to work for Iowa's non-game wildlife and the contribution is tax-deductible. Please consider contributing to the Fish/Wildlife Fund – it is one of most hassle-free ways to make a difference for wildlife. The check-offs are on line 58 of the state tax form.

For more information, contact the Wildlife Diversity Program at 515-432-2823.

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Iowa Fishing Report

www.iowadnr.gov

January 29, 2008

Ice fishing reports are issued every other week while quality ice conditions exist. For current information on ice fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report.

Northwest

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): A few nice yellow perch are being caught in 20 to 22 feet of water off Buffalo Run using wax worms and wigglers tipped on small spoons. Bluegill fishing is good in Trickle Slough and the North Grade using wax worms. Crappies are fair in Trickle Slough and the North Grade. A few walleyes are being caught in the evening off Buffalo Run

West Okoboji Lake (Dickinson): Bluegill fishing is good in Little Millers, and Little Emerson bays. Some fish are also being caught in Smith's Bay, the North Bay and Pocahontas point. Walleye fishing is fair in Haywards Bay, Pillsbury Point, Millers Bay and the north end. Minnow style jigging baits tipped with minnow heads fished near rock humps have been best. Anglers have picked up some fish along weed lines.

Trumbull (Clay): A few nice yellow perch are being caught on the north end.

Center Lake (Dickinson): A few walleyes are being caught in the basin.

Lost Island (Palo Alto): Anglers are catching a few crappies and walleyes.

Lake Pahoja (Lyon): Crappie fishing is fair and sorting is required for larger fish. A few bluegills are being caught.

Crawford Creek (Ida): Fishing is good for 9-inch bluegill and crappie using teardrops with wax worms.

Arrowhead Lake (Sac): Fishing is fair for bluegill. Some sorting required for larger fish.

Storm Lake (Buena Vista): Walleye fishing is good. Anglers are reminded that Storm Lake has a 17 to 22-inch protected slot for walleyes.

Brushy Creek Lake (Webster): Bluegill and crappie fishing has been fair. Bluegills like a wax worm right off the bottom. Try for crappies with minnows. A few walleye have been caught jigging with a minnow.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): Ice depths are running 20 to 22 inches. Walleye fishing has been good using minnows and jigging spoons at sunrise and sunset. Fishing in the area of the rock reefs, weed beds, and even in the mudflats are producing good catches. Remember Clear Lake has a 14-inch minimum length on walleye with only one of the fish over 22 inches and a daily limit of three. Yellow bass are hitting on small jigging spoons tipped with minnow heads. Catch rates have improved on yellow bass, especially for anglers fishing during the sunrise and sunset periods.

Blue Pit –Lester Milligan Park (Cerro Gordo): Trout were stocked for the third time into big Blue on Jan. 24, and good numbers of fish are available. Small jigging spoons tipped with wax worms or the prepared trout baits are working the best.

Beeds Lake (Franklin): Crappie and bluegill are hitting, but sorting is required for acceptable size fish. Small ice jigs tipped with minnows or wax worms work best.

Indian Lake – Eldred Sherwood Park (Hancock): Bluegill fishing is fair. Use small ice jigs tipped with wax worms for the best action.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.

Northeast

Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15: Ice conditions remain solid with 12 to 18 inches of ice in most areas. Cold weather forecast for this week should only strengthen ice. The cold weather has iced in the DNR ramp in Guttenberg and due to the ice pack open water fishing for walleye is not recommended at this time. Anglers can call the DNR office in Guttenberg for ice conditions if the weather improves. In lower Pool 11, **Sunfish Lake** has been very popular with slow to good fishing and some nice yellow perch being caught. In Pool 10, **Bussey Lake** has been good in the late afternoon for bluegills.

Methodist Lake in the **Sny Magill** area has had mixed reports with slow to good fishing for bluegills and some nice crappies. Near Harpers Ferry, **Joyce Lake** is slow to good fishing with a mixed bag of bluegill and crappie and anglers have reported a few nice crappie near the spillway. In Pool 9 **Shore Slough** has reported good fishing and **Fish Lake** near New Albin has been popular.

Cedar (Black Hawk) and **Shell Rock** (Butler) rivers: Walleye fishing continues to be good. Fish the deeper holes with vertical jigging spoons or jigs tipped with wax worms or minnows.

Fish have been caught in most area Black Hawk County lakes, try **George Wyth Lake, Big Woods Lake, South Prairie Lake, Meyer Lake** and **Casey Lake**.

Brinker Lake (Black Hawk): Fishing has been good for crappie, bluegill and channel catfish with the most action in the early morning and before sundown. Channel catfish have been caught suspended so try jigging well off of the bottom.

Avenue of the Saints Lake (Bremer): Fishing is good for crappies and bluegills. The fish are abundant, but are on the small side.

Lake Delhi (Delaware): Bluegills and crappies are good. Delhi has a consistent bite when other lakes are slow.

Lake Meyer (Winneshiek): Fishing has slowed for bluegill but crappies 7 to 10-plus inches are being caught along the south side of the lake, suspended in 5 to 8 feet of water. Anglers have been using white and pink jigs tipped with a wax worm and without.

Lake Meyer has about 14 inches of ice in most areas. The best time to fish continues to be late afternoon.

Hendricks Lake (Howard): Anglers have to work to get fish, but they are catching fish using a jig tipped with a wax worm. Sorting may be necessary for larger bluegills. Hendricks Lake has about 12 inches of ice, but be careful around the aerator. Anglers are asked to use the north entrance for lake access which is located ¼ mile north of the main entrance and the first gravel road to the right.

Volga Lake (Fayette): Fishing has been slow. Try fishing a different spot if a fish does not bite right away. Also try suspending lures in 3 to 6 feet of water this time of year.

Trout streams are open and fishable.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-927-3276.

Southeast

Mississippi River Pools 16 to 20: Ice conditions have improved over the last week but with rain predicted early this week conditions could change. The main channel is frozen and backwaters have 5 to 6 inches of ice. Ice fishing in the backwaters has been slow to fair. Most of the good ice fishing reports have been coming from farm ponds.

In Pool 16, anglers cannot access the tailwaters at the Marquette Street boat ramp in Davenport due to the channel freezing over. Ice fishing has been fair in the backwaters around **Credit Island**. In Pool 17, anglers cannot access the tailwaters at the Muscatine boat ramp due to ice conditions. Ice conditions in **Big Timber** are good with 5 to 6 inches of ice. Fishing has been slow. The tailwaters in Pool 18 are not accessible due to ice blocking the ramp at **Toolsboro**. Pool 19 and 20 had no fishing reports.

Lake Darling (Washington): There is some water on the ice but cold weather forecasted for this week should freeze this back up. Look for crappies along the creek channel in 9 to 10 feet of water. There are plenty of stake beds and pallet beds at these depths so concentrate your efforts there.

Lake Belva Deer (Keokuk): Anglers are still working over the crappies and bluegills around the south boat ramp. Look to the trees along the creek channel as another area to find fish.

Lake Geode (Henry): The lake has finally frozen, although the ice is still not very thick. The warm weather over the weekend and forecasted for early this week won't help the situation. Use caution if venturing out on it, cold weather later this week should help to firm it up.

Lake Rathbun (Appanoose): Crappie fishing has been slow with anglers having some success in the Buck Creek and South Fork areas using small jigs tipped with a wax worm or a minnow. Most fish being caught have been near some type of underwater structure.

Lake Sugema (Van Buren): Bluegills and crappies have been hitting on small jigs tipped with a wax worm. Some anglers have been catching walleyes near the dam on minnows and spoons.

Lake Wapello (Davis): Bluegills and some largemouth bass have been biting on small jigs tipped with a wax worm or a minnow. Remember the catch and release only regulation on largemouth bass at Lake Wapello.

Lake Macbride (Johnson): Bluegills are always plentiful here, however, they lack in size. Bluegills are around almost any type of structure and can be caught on small jigs/wax worms. Crappies have been fairly willing to bite as well. Fish over deeper brush or rock with small jigs or spoons tipped with wax worms. Be prepared to sort through 8 to 9-inch fish while looking for the larger crappies.

Diamond Lake (Poweshiek): Bluegills are biting on jigs/wax worms fished over brush or pallet structures. The deeper structure may produce some crappies as well, especially towards dark. Remember, no minnows allowed here.

Kent Park Lake (Johnson): Bluegills are being caught in and around the deep brush. Early and late in the day tends to be the best time for catching fish here.

Union Grove Lake (Tama): Anglers are catching good numbers of average-sized bluegills on jigs/wax worms fishing around deeper brush. A few crappies are also being taken, especially at dawn/dusk. There is an aerator in use at the dam end of the lake so use caution in that area.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.

Southwest

Big Creek (Polk): Crappies are being caught using small jigs tipped with a minnow or wax worm in 30 feet of water during early morning or at dusk. Bluegills up to 9 inches are being caught fishing over the cedar tree piles on small jigs tipped with a wax worm or maggot.

Saylorville (Polk): Crappies up to 13-1/2 inches are biting small jigs tipped with a minnow fished near brush piles.

Hickory Grove (Story): Bluegills up to 8 inches are being caught fishing near structure using small jigs tipped with a wax worm.

Don Williams (Story): Bluegills up to 9 inches are being caught fishing near structure using small jigs tipped with a wax worm. Crappies up to 13 inches are being caught fish early morning and at dusk.

Contact Ben Dodd at (515) 432-2823, Ext.108, for information on the above area lakes

Fogle Lake (Ringgold): Ice conditions are good. A few bluegills and a few crappies are being caught in deeper water near structure with wax worms and minnows. Midday seems to be better for bluegill with mornings and evenings a little better for crappie.

Walnut Creek Marsh (Ringgold): Ice conditions are good. The marsh has some open water from the winter aeration system. A few nice bluegills are being caught with wax worms on the edge of the dike trench.

Lake of Three Fires (Taylor): Ice conditions are good. A few nice bluegills and crappies are being caught with wax worms and minnows.

Icaria (Adams): Ice conditions are good. A few nice bluegills and crappies are being caught with wax worms and minnows. Some walleye activity has centered on the old road bed that crosses the main arm.

Three Mile Lake (Union): Ice conditions are good. Good numbers of bluegills are being caught next to deep structure on wax worms. Crappies seem to be harder to

find, but a few are being caught next to deep structure. Some perch have been caught near the pump house point.

Twelve Mile Lake (Union): Ice conditions are good. Nice bluegills are being caught with wax worms on 15 to 18 foot flats. Some walleye have been picked up on the old road.

Slip Bluff Lake (Decatur): Ice conditions are good. Bluegills and a few crappies are being caught near brushy structure in deep water.

Farm ponds have had variable reports.

Contact Gary Sobotka at (641) 464-3108 for information on the above area lakes.

Ice conditions have been reported as good with area lakes having 10 to 14 inches. Always check ice conditions frequently and be aware of potential weak ice.

Nodaway Lake (Adair): No report.

Morman Trail (Adair): Bluegills and crappie are slow with a few being caught around sunken cedar trees.

Greenfield Lake (Adair): Bluegill and crappie have been slow. Try small jigs tipped with wax worm or minnows around deep structure.

Meadow Lake (Adair): Bluegills are fair around deep structure. Crappies are slow.

Lake Anita (Cass): Fishing is good for 7 to 8-inch bluegills. The best catches have come from the flat in the south arm in 19 feet of water.

Manawa (Pottawattamie): Crappie fishing is still good with 9 to 12-inch fish being caught on jigs and minnows. A few walleyes are being caught on larger minnows on the south side of the lake. Manawa has 8 to 11 inches of ice.

Willow Lake (Harrison): Anglers have been catching 8-inch bluegills using wax worms.

Anderson Area (Montgomery): Bluegills are good with reports of 8 inch fish being caught on teardrops tipped with a wax worm.

Southwest Iowa Farm Ponds: The best fishing reports have been from privately owned small ponds for bluegill and in the larger ponds, crappie, using teardrops tipped with wax worm. Ice thickness is 10 to 12 inches.

Contact Bryan Hayes at (712) 769-2587 for information on the above area lakes.

For more information on general fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

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